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Women Economic Empowerment and Rural Development in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu, State.

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Abstract

This study examines how women's economic empowerment determines rural development in Nsukka, South Eastern Nigeria. Data for the study were gathered from women in the age bracket of (18 years and above) using questionnaire (n=189) and was selected through purposive sampling technique and in-depth interview (n=6) conducted in three communities in Nsukka LGA. The study adopted cross-sectional survey design. Percentages and chi-square statistics were used to describe the data. The result shows that there was a statistically significant relationship ($p < .000$) between educational qualification and participation in rural development. The study indicated that there was a statically significant relationship ($p < .026$) between income level of respondents and participation in rural development. Also, the result indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship ($p < .007$) between age and participation in rural development. The study concludes by stating that women with education participate more in rural development however, it is recommended that government and relevant authorities should ensure that funding for women empowerment programs is not negotiated while women association should be encouraged to enhance their positive impacts in lives of members of their community area.

Keywords: economic, empowerment, rural development, education.

Introduction

Great mind have frequently discussed and cited the empowerment of women with regards to rural development. Potentially, women contribute to the development process of any nation. However, women are limited by some factors that keep them ineffective. Thus, Kabeer, (2000) observed that the common factor is that, they are all constrained by their reproductive responsibilities, societal norms, beliefs, customs and values by which societies differentiate between them and men. Poverty among most women, gender division of labour and the male dominated social structure shape these constraints to a very great extent.

Empowerment is instrumentally important in delivering positive transformation and well-being of life which lies in doing what one values and have reasons to value (Narayana, 2002).

Empowerment is associated with indirect indicators like education and work participation of women, access to economic resources, decision making and mobility. Many gains have been made to overall level of education worldwide and more children than ever are now attending primary school. Hence the plight of women, in terms of education is compounded by this negative attitude of parents toward female education (Oniye, 2010).

The levels of education for women, poverty, and the attitude of men towards women have over the years given a great deal of threat to women's participation in the development processes. This could be the reason why Ojoh (2012) argues that, in Africa, women are politically underrepresented, with little or no decision –making power. Nigeria is positioned to as one of the countries in the continent lagging behind due to the effect of male-dominance.

Women have been playing developmental roles over the years in the society as more awareness is being created with connection to incorporating gender perspective in policy making and the adoption of gender-inclusive approaches in the implementation of development goals. In recent times, (Onyeishi, 2011) stated that there has been evidence of sustainable development and peace. This would validate Onwubiko (2012) when he stated that women are fundamental human reservoirs of every society and in the traditional societies of Africa and Asia.

Regrettably, in Nigeria today, women have not been fully mobilized and empowered to contribute to national development. If it had been so, we would not have been talking about good health for women, educational, economic, social, cultural and political empowerment for women, and in all its ramification, women would not have been segregated and discriminated against so much so that they are sexually tortured and harassed in their seeking for employment, contracts, political positions and in other endeavours (Onwubiko, 2012).

According to IMF, when more women work, economies grow. Women's economic empowerment boosts productivity, increases economic diversification and income equality in addition to other positive development outcomes. Women in Work Index (2018) stated that increasing the female employment rates in OECD countries to match that of Sweden, could boost GDP by over USD 6 trillion, recognizing, however, that growth does not automatically lead to a reduction in gender-based inequality. Conversely, it is estimated that gender gaps cost the economy some 15 percent of GDP (Cuberes & Teignier, 2016)

Statement of the Problem

On a good note, Olawoye (1995) describes Nigerian women as a crucial factor in production. According to her, they are largely responsible for the bulk production of crops, agro- based food processing, preservation of crops and distribution of yields from farm centres to market in both rural and urban areas. This assertion is in line with the review of Kwesiga (1999) and Agwu (2001) who observed that the major institutional constraints in women's participation in economic activities and development process are inadequate access to factors of production and trade, lack of credit facilities, lack of training opportunities and skill acquisition, limited access to appropriate production technologies and social services. As a result, women in Nigeria are unable to secure credit facilities from financial institutions due to lack of collaterals (Ikeduru 2002). To forestall this, Sathiabama (2010) remarks that the economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-qua-non of progress for a country; hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social scientists and reformers.

It is worth noting that many government and international organizations endorsed various policies in support of women empowerment for effective development, but such policies seem to have not resulted in substantial reduction in women underdevelopment in many countries like Nigeria where men and women could contribute to development differently (Obanya, 2003). DuBois (2010) observed that when people experience empowerment, they feel effective, conclude that they are competent, and perceive that they have power and control over the course of their lives. These policies and ideas aim at the enlargement of the access of women to education, encouraging their full participation in cash economy and politics and reviewing laws on status of women.

One sure way of empowering women and reducing gender inequality in today's fast changing world, especially in a developing society is by getting more women educated and employed. Women education is therefore necessary for developing countries especially to; experience higher economic growth, reduce incidence of poverty, increase average wage, increase share of trade in gross domestic product, and improve health.

Though some of these empowerment policies exist, but the efficiency of them in promoting the participation of Nsukka women in rural development processes need to be straightened hence, the need for this study. This research therefore examined the effects of women's economic empowerment on the rural development, using Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State as a study area.

Literature Review

Empowerment is viewed as an essential strategy to strengthen the well-being of individuals, families, communities and government agencies (Aref, 2010). Hence, rural development is the process of socio-economic change occurring in rural area for the purpose of raising the standard of living and improving livelihoods and favourable changes life in the way of life of the majority of population residing in rural areas. Pitiablely, the Nigerian women have not really enjoyed equal economic participation with their male counterparts; yet, they form more than 70% of food producers in the country (Handy & Kassan 2004). To this effect, Ojoh (2012) asserted that in Afugiri, Abia State, women are the major food producers; they built more than three oil mills and cassava processing centres, through their labour, which has left most of them who have no one to care for them in penury. Hence, rural development refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated area.

The role of women in agricultural production in line with community development as Leilanie Lu (2010) observed in a study carried out in Philippines, the role of women in agriculture is not merely complementary to that of men, but the same as their male counterparts. The role ranges from clearing of land, fertilizer application, pesticide application to harvesting and trading. In their study among rural women in Depalpur, Parkistan, Butt, Hassan, Mahmood and Muhhamed (2010) observed that women play a key role in the agricultural sector by working with full passion in the production of crops right from soil preparation till post harvest activities. In a study in the Phillipines, Chong-Javier (2009) revealed that women have long occupied a central place in agricultural production in developing countries, ensuring food security for their household and their communities.

In Nigeria, according to Ijere (1991) women form over half of the rural population and it is estimated that 80 percent of rural labour force is provided by women. Another estimate by

UNDP claims that about one third of all African households are headed by women. In terms of sectional allocations, agriculture appears to be the occupation of 70.3% of Nigerian women. Yet, it is known that agriculture has the largest chunk of the poor for women. The poverty is compounded by the fact that only 8 percent of women hold title to the land they work on (UNFPA 1992).

In their study, Ekesionye and Okolo (2012) observed that women have restricted access to socio economic rights and privileges. They enjoy lower social status and are hindered by harmful traditional practices to exhibit their potentials. Hence, they suffer discrimination in terms of land use, limited access to credit facilities etc. To support this, Agwu (2001) recapped that the major institutional constraints in women's participation in economic activities and development process in societies are inadequate access to factors of production and trade, lack of credit facilities, lack of training opportunities and skill acquisition, limited access to appropriate production technologies and social services. This has thus been an issue in the recent past and has been the bone of contention. In her own prolific examination, Oguonu (2010) using a descriptive survey and data sourced from the natural environment, concluded that women have in many ways added to the socio-economic development in Nigeria especially at the grassroots. From her research findings, 720 respondents, which amounts to (70.18%) of the total population agreed that women have made noteworthy contribution to agriculture while 206 respondents, amounting to (29.8%) of the total population sampled were either undecided or disagreed. It was also revealed that in the areas of health projects, women have made tremendous contributions to the socio-economic development. It is from the facts of this research work that she held the view that women in whatever position they find themselves have made significant contributions to developments in general.

In a study which examined women empowerment and participation in economic activities as tools for self reliance and development of Nigeria society, Ekesionye and Okolo (2012) found that most economic hustles performed by women especially women in Anambra State are trading, hair dressing, farming, craft, poultry etc. They create fund from the economic activities through their savings, philanthropic assistance, group contributions, loans and credits from corporative societies and the likes. In their recommendations, they viewed that provision of soft loans and credits, sustainable land tenure system, training programmes will enhance women

participation in economic activities. Each person has a role to play in the development of the nation. However, for any society to endure, both men and women alike, have roles to play as members of the society (Onyeishi 2011). To attest to this, Ojoh (2012) observed that the development of any society demands the effort and commitment of every member. Hence, for the progress and betterment of the society, men and women are to work together whereas women are to be more accommodated, because of their intuitive power. Even in most cultures, it is seen as an abomination when women or a wife goes in search of development without the consent of the husband. It is in this highlight, Onwubuiko (2012) posits that the access of women to finance and capital is so minimal that women are generally disadvantaged in terms of economic stability and independence.

Theoretical Orientation

Social Capital Theory

This theory is linked to authors such as Bourdieu and Coleman (Hauberer, 2011). The theory emphasizes on collective effort of grass roots groups in a community in which people come together to work in order to improve their socio-economic standard of living for the development of their community through collective effort.

The theory emphasizes collective social economic benefits derived from cooperation between individuals and groups in our communities through collective efforts. The theory is perceived as bond that binds individual and groups together for socio-economic reasons. It involves people and groups working together in trust to achieve stated developmental objectives. This theory holds that women in large group should come together to work for the development of their communities and to help one another in coordinated form.

Research Methodology

The study was carried out in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, in the South Eastern Nigeria. Significantly, Nsukka Local Government Area is bounded by Kogi State, Igbo Eze South Local Government Area. According to the National population Commission (2006), the area is made up of a total population of 309,633 with female population of 160,392, and male population is 149,241. It is comprises of 14 rural communities and one urban community,

Nsukka. The Nsukka is further divided into three autonomous communities viz Nru, Ihe/Owerre and Nkpunanor. Each of these autonomous communities has many villages.

This study used sample size of 189 respondents drawn from the study Area. Purposive sampling was used to select four communities in Nsukka Local Government Area which are Obukpa and Opi to represent the rural areas and Ihe-Owerre and Nru to represent the urban centres in Nsukka. This is to determine if location can affect women's economic empowerment.

The responses to the questionnaire were tallied and put into frequency distribution table. Simple percentage was used to describe the characteristics in study subjects. Chi square (X^2) statics was used to test the research hypotheses. The data from questionnaires were analyzed using statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). This would help in clarity and understanding.

Data Presentation of Findings

The data obtained from distribution of respondent by sex indicates that males constitutes 26.5% of the respondents while 73.5% are made up of females which indicates that majority of the respondents are women. From the age distribution it is noted that 18-22 years is 13.2%, 23-27 years is 10.1%, 28-32 years is 27.0%, 33-37 years is 19.0%, 38 -42 years is 18.5% and 43 years and above is 12.2%. From all indications it can be observed that majority of the respondents belong to 28-32 years. Respondents by level of income in this study indicate that 36.0% of respondents have income level of 10, 000 - 30, 000, 22.2% 31, 000 – 60, 000, 20.6% 61, 000 – 90, 000 and 21.2% have income level of 91, 000. The data show that majority of the respondents have income level of 10, 000 – 30, 000. The data further indicates that 24.3% of the respondents had no formal education, 41.3% had secondary education while 34.4% had tertiary education. This means that majority of the respondents (41.3%) acquired secondary education.

Education, income and age were cross tabulated to test the hypotheses. Respondents were grouped into two: those with primary and secondary education were re-coded as non-educated and those with tertiary education were re-coded as educated. 83.9% of non-educated participated in rural development and 16.1% indicated that they have participated. On the other hand, 27.7% of the educated have participated in rural development while 72.3% have not participated in rural development. Therefore, with the computed $x^2=58.817$; $df=1$, the test shows that there is a statistically significant relationship ($p<.000$) between educational qualification and participation

in rural development. Therefore, more educated women are more likely to participate in rural development than non-educated women. Again, respondents were grouped into two: those with income level of 10, 000-60, 000 were re-coded as low income earners while those with income of 61, 000 and above were re-coded as high income. The result show that 51.8% of low income earners participated in rural development while 48.2% did not participate. On the other hand, 35.4% of those with high income have participated and 64.6% have not participated. With the computed $\chi^2=4,982$; $df=1$, the test show that there is statistically significant relationship between ($p<.026$) between income level and participation in rural development. Therefore the substantive hypothesis which states that women with high level of income are more likely to participate in rural development is upheld. Finally, respondents were grouped into two: those between the ages of 18-32 were re-coded as younger women and those between 33 years and above were re-coded as older women. The result show that 65.3% of younger women participated in rural development and 48.2% have not participated. Some 45.7% of older women have participated in rural development while 54.3% have not. With the computed $\chi^2=7.290$; $df=1$, the test show that there is a statistically significant relationship ($p<.007$) between age and participation in rural development. Therefore the substantive hypothesis which states that older women are more likely to participate in rural development is upheld.

Discussion of Findings

Results from the research indicated that a greater percentage of females make up the respondents which indicates that majority of the respondents are females. A large number of age respondents are between the ages of 28-32 years and have participated in rural development while on a general note income earners between 10, 000 – 30, 000 formed the greater percentage of income distribution and have participated in rural development. The study also show that the greater majority of the respondents agree that women's educational status affect the extent of their involvement in rural development hence, greater percentage have participated in rural development. The study also found that lack of funding for women empowerment programmes followed by followed by gender preference is factors hindering women empowerment in the study area. The findings revealed also that most respondents agreed on the statement that project by the women association impacted positively to lives of members of the rural dwellers.

In Summary, the major findings of the study include the followings:

- ❖ There was a statistically significant relationship ($p < .000$) between educational qualification and participation in rural development
- ❖ There was a statistically significant relationship ($p < .026$) between income level of respondents and participation in rural development.
- ❖ Finally the result indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship ($p < .007$) between age and participation in rural development.
- ❖ It was also noted that majority of the respondents agree that women with higher income more likely to participate in rural development than women with lower income.
- ❖ Majority of respondents agreed on the statement that project by the women association impacted positively to lives of members of their community/area
- ❖ The result also indicated that lack of funding for women empowerment programmes followed by gender preferences, non involvement of women in decision making are factors hindering women empowerment in the study area.

Conclusion

The major objective of the study was the effects of women economic empowerment in rural development in Nsukka Local Government Area. However, this study, owing to its finding that women economic empowerment affects their participation in rural development in Nsukka Local Government Area; reveals that there is need to empower women more than ever before to really participate in the rural development programmes of their communities/areas. Every support should be rendered to women without debate for maximum productivity and rural development. The findings of this study have clear positive implications for policy and future research.

Recommendations

Based on the research outcome, the following were recommended:

There is every need to create income-generating opportunities for the women. This will enable them to participate actively in the development of their communities.

Women associations should also be encouraged to enhance their positive impact on the lives of members of their community/area

Governmental and Non-governmental organizations should organize seminars that will focus on the younger women in order to educate them on the need to participate more in rural development than older ones.

Government and relevant authorities should ensure that funding for women empowerment programmes is not an option.

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